

Town Council of West Lincoln  
318 Canborough St.  
Smithville, Ontario L0R2A0

Dear Members of the Council,

I am respectfully requesting the Council consider and find that a small number of hens (2 to 3), kept properly confined in their owner's yard, be deemed as household pets, and therefore permitted to be kept in urban and residential communities of West Lincoln.

The local foods movement is not only gaining ground, it is here to stay; and that includes family flocks of chickens. Chickens are the mascots of local foods because of the many talents and skill sets they innately bring to small scale food production. These skill sets include being pesticides (eating mosquitoes, ticks and fleas), herbicides (by eating and clearing unwanted vegetation), and organic fertilizer generators (that can help create and enhance garden soil). The trend for backyard flocks is so strong, that in the past few years, towns and cities have revised their laws to allow urban folks to keep their own chickens. With the reemergence of backyard chickens across the country, there have been tremendous amounts of misconceptions, false beliefs and downright prejudice surrounding the keeping of micro-flocks of chickens.

Across the country, urban and suburban areas are allowing small backyard flocks of hens. Major cities allowing hens as pets to be kept, include; Toronto, Ottawa, Brampton, Kitchener, Burlington, Sudbury, Sarnia, Cambridge, Guelph, Kingston, Waterloo, Brantford, Niagara Falls, Peterborough, Orangeville, Norfolk County, Hallimand and several others.

#### Hens as Pets

Owners of pet hens prize them for their tame, friendly and entertaining personalities, but also because they can play a part in a greener lifestyle. They naturally control insect pests, eat vegetable scraps, improve the lawn and provide eggs for the table.

Hens properly kept in a yard are comparable to rabbits in terms of care. An adult hen will thrive in 4 to 8 square feet of pen, compared to about 7 to 10 feet for a rabbit. It can be seen that backyard hens are pets to most home owners, rather than livestock from several points. First, the owner keeps hens ONLY; keeping chickens as livestock would require a rooster for breeding. Secondly, eggs produced by backyard hens, if any, would be used by the owners and not sold (for meat or eggs produced). Finally, the number of hens would be too small to constitute a profitable venture in either eggs or meat.

I'd like to present a few benefits to allowing hens as pets.

#### (1) Fresh Eggs from Humanely Raised Hens

Home raised hens living in spacious, clean conditions produce eggs that are fresher, better tasting and often more nutritious than their commercially farmed counterparts. Raising chickens also promotes the humane treatment of food-producing animals and a local, sustainable food system.

#### (2) Pets, Companions, and Therapy Animals

Depression, anxiety, PTSD, autism, hypertension, dementia, end-of-life care, and even general stress can be eased by the presence of animals, including chickens. "Chickens are social and empathetic creatures. As such, they can form special bonds with their human caretakers. These bonds can tremendously help individuals who are suffering from mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and more. Therapy chickens have been found to lower levels of isolation and loneliness—both major contributors to mental illness. Studies have shown that they reduce anxiety and depression, they encourage verbal communication, they encourage routine and responsibility and they provide laughter and lessen loneliness.

Pet chickens are routinely used as therapy animals for individuals with a wide array of emotional, physical and other life challenges, as well as visitors to the elderly in health and retirement facilities.

Pet chickens are a hobby for most modern-day keepers; they provide companionship, entertainment and stress reduction. They are appreciated for their distinct personalities and their curious social interactions with each other.

Chickens are green pets. They eat a variety of weeds and disease-carrying insects, making backyard and water supplies safer than those where toxic insecticides and pesticides are routinely applied. Given the opportunity, they gladly till, turn, aerate, and enrich gardens with homemade, nitrogen-rich fertilizer.

There have been references to several reasons why there has been hesitation to allowing backyard chickens within the residential zoned areas of West Lincoln, and I'd like to present the following Myths and Facts.

**Myth:** Chickens are dirty and smelly.

**Fact:** Chickens spend hours each day dust bathing and meticulously preening themselves to maintain good hygiene. Chickens do not smell – animal waste smells. ALL animal waste smells. When managed properly, no odors emanate from a chicken yard. Compared to dogs, chickens produce valuable waste that can be used as valuable garden amendment, compared to a dog that generates pathogenic waste that is not usable.

**Myth:** Chickens attract rodents and predators

**Fact:** Wild animals and rodents reside in every neighborhood and are attracted to food sources such as seed in wild bird feeders and garbage cans which can be found in hundreds of yards everywhere. Concerns related to attracting rodents and predators should really be addressed by restricting bird feeders, which entice rodents and wild birds into yards where they can transmit diseases. Skunks, raccoons and other wild animals frequent backyards regardless of whether chickens occupy those yards. Chicken keepers are simply more aware of the threat predators pose to their pets than the average homeowner because we spend a lot of money implementing safeguards to prevent losses to them. Indeed, chickens are part of the solution to pesky problems. Chickens are voracious carnivores and will seek and eat just about anything that moves including ticks (Lymes disease), fleas, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, stink bugs, slugs, and even mice, baby rats and small snakes

**Myth:** Chickens carry disease that can spread

**Fact:** The truth is that small flocks have literally no risk of avian flu transmission. The 2006 Grain Report states: "When it comes to bird flu, diverse small-scale poultry is the solution, not the problem."

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states on their website: "There is no need at present to remove a (family) flock of chickens because of concerns regarding avian flu." Avian flu has been in the press as concern to commercial poultry production where birds are raised in monster-size flocks that are confined in over-crowded environments. This causes high stress and compromised immune systems in the birds. Any sign of disease, including a sneeze, could result in a huge number of birds getting sick; and this puts at risk a large amount of profit. As many experts have stated publicly, the solution to avian flu is in small-scale poultry.

There is one huge advantage to family flocks that is often overlooked. That is their role and value in solid waste management systems. Chickens can divert tons of organic matter from the trash collection and landfills. Chickens will eat just about all kitchen "waste". They love people food, even those leftovers in the refrigerator. Combine their manure with grass clippings, fallen leaves and garden waste, and you create compost. Composting with chicken helpers keeps tons of biomass out of municipal trash collection systems.

All this can save BIG TIME taxpayer dollars, which is especially valuable in these times of stressed municipal budgets.

There is precedence for employing family flocks as part of trash management. One example is the town of Deist in Flanders, Belgian. The city buys laying hens to give to residents who want them. The chickens' job is to divert food waste from the trash stream and not having to be pickup by workers, transported, and then disposed. The savings are significant.

I have done some research on the transmission of Avian Flu, which is a concern that is being taken into consideration for legalization of backyard chickens.

The province of Manitoba has reported the following:

"In North America there are two major reservoirs or sources of avian influenza:

1. Wild ducks and geese in Canada and the U.S. naturally carry a wide range of avian influenza viruses. None of these North American strains have been implicated directly in killing large numbers of poultry and none are known to have made people sick. Of the many variations of the virus found in wild waterfowl, a few have the potential to mutate after they infect a poultry flock into forms that will kill large numbers of birds. In strains native to North America, the virus must cycle through thousands of domestic poultry before it has the opportunity to change into a highly pathogenic strain capable of killing large numbers of chickens or turkeys. No cases are known where an avian influenza virus has mutated into the deadly form in a small flock of chickens or turkeys.
2. The 100 or more live bird markets in New York, New Jersey and other U.S. states are a man-made reservoir of the disease. At these live bird markets, people can pick out live chickens, turkeys, ducks and other animals that they can have slaughtered on-site or take home to process themselves. Because of the large number and turnover of birds at these markets, the virus has the opportunity to survive by infecting the thousands of birds that pass through the markets on a weekly basis. The virus also has the potential to mutate to a deadly form under these conditions. The close contact between thousands of people visiting the markets and the manure and feathers produced by the birds is a potential human health problem. Fortunately, no live bird markets that can act as effective reservoirs of avian influenza are known to operate in Manitoba. To be an effective reservoir, a market will likely need to operate 40 weeks or more each year and accept hundreds of new birds on a weekly or monthly basis. (unless we have these live bird markets here in West Lincoln or surrounding area, we are safe from this)

The Government of Canada (Inspection Canada):

### **How avian influenza is transmitted and spread**

Wild birds, especially waterfowl, are natural reservoirs of influenza viruses. They are not normally affected by the disease, but can still transmit it to domestic birds.

The disease can spread to birds through **contact** with infected poultry and poultry products. It can also spread through contaminated manure, litter, clothing, footwear, vehicles, equipment, feed and water.

It is essential for commercial poultry producers to use strict [biosecurity practices](#) in order to prevent introduction of the virus to their flock. Farmers should take the following measures.

- Keep poultry away from areas frequented by wild birds.
- Maintains strict control over access to poultry houses.
- Make sure that equipment is cleaned and disinfected before taking it into poultry houses.
- Do not keep bird feeders or create duck ponds close to poultry barns because they attract wild birds.
- Maintain high sanitation standards.

They further advise:

If you are in contact with live birds infected with the AI virus, take appropriate personal hygiene measures, such as the following.

- Wash your hands
- Shower
- Wash all of the clothing you had with you while abroad
- Clean and disinfect your footwear

When you return home, do the following.

- Avoid contact with farmed animals (including poultry), zoo animals or wildlife for 5 days after you return if you were exposed to similar animals while you were abroad.
- Do not visit Canadian farms for 14 days if you visited a farm or had contact with wild birds while abroad.
- Be sure the footwear you wore to the farm or when you had contact with wild birds is disinfected and your clothing is washed thoroughly and dried at a high temperature.

As per above, there are rules enacted by the Government of Canada to protect farms and farm animals. Poultry farmers should not normally allow others to enter their poultry houses and if they do, they should be following strict regulations imposed by the Government of Canada to protect their flocks.

West Lincoln has many, many homes which are zoned as farm land and most of these homes have dozens of chickens which are kept for the sale of eggs and meat. Some know how to raise

chickens; others are just learning. The idea that just by the fact that you own a piece of land that allows for the raising of dozens of chickens is safer than someone who owns a home in an area zoned as residential is not safe, is a bit prejudicial. Any city person who has a bit of money and decides they want to come live in the country, buys a farm and has chickens, is no more knowledgeable than one who has a home in a residential area. Some of us came from environments where we lived on farms in the past, or have parents who lived on farms. In many cases, the farms that have chickens, goats, horses, pigs, sheep etc, are literally one street away.

Backyard hen owners invest a lot of money and efforts into the care of their hens. The fact that they only have 2 to 4 hens, allows for individual attention to each of their pets/hens. They even give them names. They are more apt to keep their coop clean and make sure they are fed properly, like they would their dog or cat. They take more care than a farm that has 30 chickens on it, with the disposal of any manure, therefore eliminating any risk of spread of any diseases. They would be more likely to wash their hands, clothing and have a good sanitation regimen, after cleaning their coop.

In conclusion, as stated by many, small flocks are not the spreaders of disease. A flock of 2 to 4 chickens have practically a zero risk to any of the chicken farms in the area. Changing the by-law will not have hundreds of families coming forward to keep chickens, but what it will do is to give the few that do want chickens for pets/companions/support animals, to have the same rights as others in many other cities and towns.

The truth is that regardless of regulations, there are many backyard flocks at present that are kept and untold number of chickens that fly under the municipal authority radar and are living in backyards unnoticed.

Enforcement is an important consideration but potential problems already fall under other municipal jurisdictions such as Animal control, Police and Health Departments. Nuisance and health codes, address smell, noise, sanitation concerns. Having said this, I'm not sure how anyone in the West Lincoln area can complain about backyard chicken smell with the smell of chicken and farm animal manure that permeates for miles in the area on a constant basis, from the farms in this area.

There will always be abuse of any standard, but a few bad actors should not be the expected norm that would prevent the responsible owners who would be following all the recommended rules. In fact, a few summonses for infractions issued to those who abuse, should fix that problem. I would presume the town would have the right to withdraw a permit to those homes.

I hope that this helps clarify some concerns and we can move forward to allowing the residents the choice.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dora Pavlidis